

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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SUBJECT: **DEFINING OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN**

SERVICE UNIT: Edie Harding, Executive Director
 State Board of Education

PRESENTERS: Phyllis Frank Bunker, Board Member

BACKGROUND:

Bunker Frank will present information to Board members on opportunity to learn and identifying the weakest link. She would like to share her work in examining these issues to address Washington students' achievement gap and our work on accountability. Enclosed are several articles she will refer to in her presentation.

EDUCATION WEEK

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Much of Learning Gap Blamed on summer

Rich-poor reading divide in Baltimore linked to what happens over break.

By Scott J. Cech

It's been a truism for decades that students' learning slips during the summer, and that low-income children fall farther behind than their classmates, but no one had connected the longitudinal data dots to show just what the cumulative consequences of the summer slide might be. Until now.

A recent study by sociology professor Karl L. Alexander and colleagues at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore concludes that two-thirds of the reading achievement gap between 9th graders of low and high socioeconomic standing in Baltimore public schools can be traced to what they learned—or failed to learn—over their childhood summers.

The study, which tracked data from about 325 Baltimore students from 1st grade to age 22, points out that various characteristics that depend heavily on reading ability—such as students' curriculum track in high school, their risk of dropping out, and their probability of pursuing higher education and landing higher-paying jobs—all diverge widely according to socioeconomic levels.

"I call this the Harry Potter divide," said Alan B. Krueger, a professor of economics and public policy at Princeton University, referring to a 2000 poll by the Princeton, N.J.-based Gallup Organization that asked adults if any of their children were reading the wildly popular series of eponymous books. The poll results showed a wide gap in the responses, based on income.

"Children from low [socioeconomic-status] backgrounds don't get that reading enrichment," said Mr. Krueger, who was chief economist of the U.S. Department of Labor in the Clinton administration.

Pace Parallel During Year

The study, which appeared in the April issue of the *American Sociological Review*, makes use of data from reading tests that were administered to the same students twice yearly, enabling researchers to isolate reading comprehension gains made during the school year with those made—or lost—during the summer.

Although the limited national data available on the subject had suggested that the gap between rich and poor would be wide, Mr. Alexander said the numbers on summer from his Baltimore study took him aback.

“What surprised me was the size of the summer learning difference,” he said.

By the end of 5th grade, the differential in cumulative scores reflecting what students of high and low socioeconomic classes learned outside of school in the summer was stark.

The summer learning among students in relatively well-educated, economically secure homes had effectively added a total of about 47 points to their test scores by that point in their school careers. Students in relatively low-income, poorly educated families had been reduced by about 2 points over that period.

By contrast, in data covering five winters, when test scores reflect mostly classroom learning, the socioeconomically disadvantaged students kept pace with their more-advantaged classmates.

“Schools are in fact compensating for a shortfall of quality learning experiences outside of school,” Mr. Alexander said. “I don’t fault parents—parents by and large are the best advocates for their children—but the reality is that many parents lack the effective tools for helping.”

Daria L. Hall, the assistant director for K-12 policy development for the Washington-based Education Trust, a nonprofit group that promotes high academic standards for disadvantaged children, worries that the findings will take policymakers’ focus off the need to close a different kind of gap.

“We can’t allow the problems of the out-of school inequities to overshadow the problems of the in-school inequities,” she said. “However way you look at it, low-income kids and kids of color get less than their fair share of quality teaching, curriculum, and resources.”

Mr. Alexander's research has also attracted interest outside of academia. Democratic presidential candidate and U.S. Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois is co-sponsoring the Summer Term Education Programs for Upward Performance Act of 2007, a bill that cites Mr. Alexander's research.

The legislation would authorize \$100 million to be divided among five states selected by the U.S. secretary of education for summer programs that combine fun and academics for children who are eligible for the federal free-lunch program. States would have to match the federal contribution of \$1,600 per child per summer.

"That would be wonderful if the states would actually sponsor high-quality programs," said Meredith Phillips, a professor of public policy and sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles.

About the study itself, Ms. Phillips said the methodology is sound and the data depth is enviable, even if the sample size is small and all drawn from one place. "This is the only data set available to study this question—we can't do any better than this," she said. "The one limitation is that we don't know how generalizable the results are from kids in Baltimore to kids nationally."

Mr. Alexander acknowledged such limitations but said he was sure "that you'd see much the same results in high-poverty school systems across the country."

Asked what would ameliorate the problem his study highlights, Mr. Alexander suggested two words: more school.

"Most advanced industrial countries have more schooling than we do—230 to 240 days a year, some of them," he noted. "The key, though, is that whatever we do, it needs to be done well."



Education Policy Brief

VOLUME 7, OCTOBER 2000

Opportunity to Learn

Accountability is one of the top priorities on educational agendas across the nation. Many states are attempting to develop systems that expect more of students and set challenging performance standards. With increased expectations for student performance comes the obligation of providing students with adequate “opportunities to learn”.

Opportunity to learn (OTL) was originally defined as the overlap between the information students were taught and the information on which they were tested. But as the push for accountability has increased, the definition of OTL has expanded to include the quality of resources, school conditions, curriculum, and teaching that students experience. All of these issues are considered critical for ensuring that students are able to meet the increased demands of performance-based accountability systems.

For more information or questions regarding this Education Policy Brief, contact:

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Introduction

According to Delaware policymakers involved in creating the Delaware Student Accountability plan, one of the original goals of the effort was to create an educational system that expects more and provides more.¹ Indeed many experts in the area of accountability believe that those holding students and schools accountable are in turn accountable for creating conditions that promote learning and provide students with adequate “opportunities to learn”.

Opportunity to learn was originally defined as a measure of “whether or not...students have had an opportunity to study a particular topic or learn how to solve a particular type of problem presented by the test”.² In recent policy discussions, OTL has come to refer not only to the overlap between what has been taught and what is tested, but to a more proactive concern with providing appropriate learning opportunities for all groups of students. It has been expanded to include the resources, school conditions, curriculum, and teaching that students experience. Moreover, in standards-based reform, OTL has been defined as “*what the education system does to enable students to meet the expectations set by the content and performance standards*”.³

Research Findings

OTL is a critical issue for at least two reasons. First, researchers have long recognized that disparities exist between certain groups of students that place some students at a disadvantage academically. Secondly, several studies have found a positive relationship between OTL and student achievement.

❑ Disparities Exist

Disparities in instructional conditions between racial and ethnic groups have been well documented. Research indicates that non-white students are disproportionately represented in lower nonacademic tracks, remedial classes, and special education classes where opportunity to learn is restricted. In addition, there is evidence to suggest that less qualified teachers, less adequate instructional materials and fewer resources (i.e., computers, equipment, laboratories, etc.) are more likely to be found in low-income or high minority schools.⁴

❑ OTL Affects Achievement

Previous research has narrowly defined OTL as the amount of overlap between what is taught and what is tested. In these studies, information on the amount and the quality of exposure to new knowledge has been gathered through teachers’ self-reports, direct observation of classroom instruction, or by examining the curriculum materials used. Many of these studies have found positive relationships between the amount of content covered and performance in that content area, but many researchers argue that content coverage is just one facet of OTL.⁵

Beyond content coverage, several studies of programs in disadvantaged urban and rural schools suggest that OTL is also influenced by school factors. In Title I elementary school-wide project sites that showed small but steady gains in student achievement, changes in school and classroom conditions were made to improve the learning environment. These changes included more site-based management, more time for teacher planning and reflection, and changing the responsibilities of district personnel from supervisor/evaluator to instructional leader. These schools also allocated resources to

provide ongoing professional development activities and to implement incentives for teacher and student attendance and performance. Other conditions at the school level that had a positive effect on achievement included a school leadership team that worked together, a system for monitoring and recognizing student progress, and methods for involving parents.⁶

Previous research on OTL has been conducted in low-stakes settings where there were no consequences attached to performance. Many experts warn about the use of OTL data in high stakes settings: **“The history of testing suggests, in fact, that when accountability stakes are high, results can become corrupted. The same policies that give rise to the current interest in assessing OTL contain within them the potential for misuse and corruption of OTL data”.**⁷ Therefore many experts indicate that OTL information should be collected for the purpose of school improvement and not for the purposes of accountability.

Measuring OTL

Research indicates that OTL is a critical issue that is often difficult to measure. Part of the difficulty arises because of the complexity of the learning process and the number of factors related to learning. In addition, most strategies for collecting OTL information (teacher self-reports, classroom observations, etc.) are time consuming and costly.

Although there are disadvantages associated with assessing OTL, many researchers believe that they are far outweighed by the advantages of assessing OTL. Advantages include: monitoring curriculum, teaching, and instruction in order to meet individual student needs and improve offerings; ensuring that an accountability system is fair; providing feedback to teachers and schools about the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and course offerings; and, developing priorities for professional development and resource allocation.

Though difficult to measure and often controversial, most researchers agree that measures of OTL should include information about the resources, school conditions, curriculum, and instruction to which students have access. The following table presents a list of factors associated with OTL that are most frequently cited in the literature.⁸

Factors Associated with OTL

Curriculum	Instructional Quality	Time	Resources	School Conditions
Aligned with content standards	Teaching experience	For lesson planning and collaboration	Adequate physical space	Instructional leadership on the part of administration
Integrated across content areas	Teacher Certification	For uninterrupted periods of instruction	Access to textbooks, technology and support materials	Policies promoting collegiality of school staff
Relevant to students and reflecting real life problems	Teacher turnover		School and community partnerships designed to address student health and social service needs	High expectations for student learning
Aligned with assessments for monitoring	Teacher attendance		Parental Involvement	Student attendance incentives
	Teacher commitment			Safe and orderly learning environment

student progress	Use of appropriate and varied teaching strategies		Quality Professional Development Equitable finance formulas within and between schools/districts	Teacher involvement in decision making
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DELAWARE SITUATION:

On November 13, 2000 the Delaware State Board of Education is sponsoring an Educational Summit designed to bring together teams of individuals representing parents, teachers, administrators, school board members, legislators, business people, community members, members of educational partner groups and other interested constituents. The goal of the summit is to celebrate Delaware's commitment to education reform and develop a plan for maximizing the opportunity to learn for all students in Delaware. Following the summit, the Delaware State Board of Education is expected to release a summary of the proceedings including a plan for continuing the commitment to education reform in Delaware.

POLICY QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- How can the state change the emphasis of administrators' responsibility from supervision to one of instructional leadership?
- In order to provide quality learning opportunities for all students, should schools be funded differentially to "level the playing field"?
- How can the state ensure that all students experience quality learning opportunities in Delaware schools (i.e. systematic monitoring of OTL)?

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Who is responsible, or "accountable," for the quality of California's school system? California's test- and standards-based "school accountability" system is very limited because the people it holds most responsible—students and teachers—have little control over learning opportunities that really matter. For example, teachers can't correct overcrowded schools, and students can't insist on having teachers who are fully credentialed. Parents, policymakers, education officials, and other civic leaders can *all* share the responsibility for guaranteeing opportunities to learn throughout California's public schools. The first step is setting OTL standards. The second step is making sure that these standards are measured and reported to the public. With good information about who needs better access to learning opportunities, everyone can make better choices about how to help improve our state's schools.

Why does OTL matter in California's school system?

Although OTL standards are not officially part of California's school quality and accountability system, recent proposals have raised the importance of looking at opportunities to learn in order to measure the quality of California's school system. The California Master Plan for Education of 2002, for example, includes a recommendation to create statewide OTL standards. This comprehensive Plan is meant to create a framework to ensure that the State meets its constitutional responsibility to provide all students with a quality education.

OTL standards have also been included in recent proposals for new state laws. A bill introduced in 2003, for example, would have required the State to create an "OTL index." This index would measure the number of fully credentialed teachers, students' access to quality instructional materials, the physical condition of school facilities, and whether counseling and academic advising were available to students at different schools around the state. Other proposals go beyond these statewide measures and include local OTL standards that students, parents and teachers could develop, such as school safety, opportunities for parent involvement, and professional development opportunities available to teachers.

What would a California OTL agenda look like?

As a start, a statewide OTL agenda, whose goal is to ensure that all students in California public schools have equal opportunities to learn and access to a quality education, would include:

- Clear OTL standards
- Good information about whether these standards exist in California schools
- Accountable school officials who are committed to ensuring that OTL standards are present in all schools and are included in the measure of school quality and achievement
- Equal funding for all schools in order to support students' opportunities to learn

References are available at: www.ucla-idea.org



Opportunity to Learn (OTL)

Does California's School System Measure Up?

What is "Opportunity to Learn"?

"Opportunity to Learn" (OTL) is a way of measuring and reporting whether students and teachers have access to the different ingredients that make up quality schools. The more OTL ingredients that are present in an individual school, school district, or even in schools across the state, the more opportunities students have to benefit from a high quality education. OTL standards provide a benchmark against which the opportunities that a school provides can be measured. Using OTL standards as a guide, students can measure whether they have a realistic shot at learning the subjects the state requires and whether they will have a fair chance to compete for college. OTL standards can also help students, parents, communities and school officials to discover and correct problems in schools. By measuring and reporting the presence or absence of learning opportunities against a set of standards, OTL can bring to light examples of unfair conditions -- both within a school or across the state school system -- that limit students' equal access to a high quality education.

What are some examples of OTL?

Some examples of OTL include students' access to:

- Qualified teachers
- Clean and safe facilities
- Up-to-date books and quality learning materials
- High quality coursework
- School conditions that provide students a fair and equal opportunity to learn and achieve knowledge and skills

OTL Checklist: Does your school measure up?

These are just a few examples of the types of questions students and parents can ask to find out if their schools have learning opportunities. In other words, these questions can help to measure whether a school is likely to meet OTL standards.

Are students in classes where the content, or school subject, is taught?

For example, if a school does not have an advanced biology class available, students can't learn the subject of advanced biology. In other words, they do not have the "opportunity" to learn advanced biology.

Do students spend enough time with the content, or subject matter, for their grade level?

For example, if students are forced to learn in a class that doesn't spend enough time on a school subject, they don't have the opportunity to gain deep knowledge about that subject. If students are forced to learn in a year-round calendar where the school year is cut short because of school overcrowding, they have less time, or opportunity, to learn at all.

Do students have books and other learning materials?

For example, if students are forced to use outdated books, books with missing pages, or have no books at all in their classrooms or to take home, they don't have the opportunity to learn current knowledge. If a school doesn't have computers available, students can't do research on the Internet. If a school doesn't have working laboratories or calculators, students can't learn certain science or math subjects.

Do teachers have the knowledge and training to be effective?

For example, if teachers have only "basic" knowledge or training, they can't answer advanced questions or teach certain subjects well. This, in turn, limits students' opportunities to learn.

Do students have laboratories, hands-on projects, and activities?

For example, if classes are limited to one-way lectures or workbooks, rather than any interactive teaching, students' learning is limited.

Does the school make clear its goals for high academic achievement?

For example, if the school doesn't provide college counseling, SAT prep courses, or classes that are required to apply for college, students never learn that college is possible or how to prepare for college.

Are the school facilities safe, healthy, and uncrowded?

For example, if classrooms are too hot, cold, or unclean, or if students are afraid or forced to take classes in packed rooms, they can't learn well.

How does OTL affect teachers?

Just like students need opportunities to learn, OTL standards can show whether teachers have the working conditions to do their best job at teaching – that is, by having basic tools such as books, labs, libraries, and clean facilities.

Why does OTL matter?

OTL standards matter because they help to show whether a school "measures up" to quality education. In other words, OTL standards:

- Tell parents, students, community members and public officials whether schools and the education system are working.
- Focus attention on what education officials and other policymakers can do to improve the quality of schools, and make sure that all schools have basic opportunities in place.
- Focus attention on the types of conditions in the school system, and not just on "outcomes" such as test scores.

Are OTL standards equal across all schools?

No. Some schools provide students with great opportunities to learn while other schools offer very few opportunities. In other words, OTL is not equal throughout California's school system, and many schools would have trouble meeting basic OTL standards. For example, research shows that schools with the highest numbers of Latino/a and African American students enrolled have the biggest shortages of textbooks and the lowest numbers of qualified teachers.

How does OTL relate to test scores or other measures of school "achievement"?

Over the past decade, efforts to improve California's school system have been guided by a simple formula based on "curriculum" standards, test scores, and so-called "accountability." This means that:

- The education system should be very clear about what subjects students are expected to learn. In other words, they must have clear "curriculum standards."
- Students will be tested to see if they have actually learned what they are supposed to. In other words, test scores are used to see if students meet "performance standards."
- Rewards and punishments for students learning or not learning (or for receiving high or low scores on the test) will motivate teachers to find the best ways of teaching and will motivate students to study harder.
- If students do not improve their test performance, they and/or their teachers will suffer consequences. In other words, students and teachers are held "accountable" for meeting the performance standards.

Opportunities to Learn have not been a part of this standards-based system. As a result, it is difficult, if not impossible, to measure students' "performance" accurately and fairly if there is no information available about whether they had a chance to learn in their schools. *For a standards-based school accountability system to be accurate, useful, and fair, OTL standards must be included along with performance standards.*

Education Leaders Launch National Center on Time & Learning

Launch comes amid national momentum for accelerating improvement in public education

WASHINGTON, DC – Members of Congress and education policy and foundation leaders came together yesterday in Washington to launch a new organization and a federal policy initiative dedicated to expanding learning time for the nation's schoolchildren.

With funding support from a variety of national education foundations including The Eli and Edythe Broad Education Foundation, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the National Center on Time & Learning will research and support national, state, and local initiatives to add more school time for academic and enrichment opportunities.

"There are no silver bullets or easy answers in public education reform," said Eli Broad, founder of The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, which has seeded the new Center with a major grant. "American education is not keeping pace with today's global economy and we believe that giving our children more quality learning time will lead to higher academic achievement for all students and help keep them and our country competitive in the 21st century," he said.



Senator Kennedy expresses his support for federal funding for expanded learning time



Chris Gabrieli, Co-Chair of the National Center on Time & Learning, John Podesta, CEO of the Center for American Progress, and Congressman Miller, the chair of the House Education Committee, discuss the National Center on Time & Learning announcement



The National Center on Time & Learning is formally launched by its President and CEO, Jennifer Davis

The launch of this new organization was announced at a reception on Capitol Hill and comes at a time when expanding learning time has gained significant national momentum.

Congress is currently considering allocating significant federal resources to school districts that want to expand their school day and year. Last week, Congressman Donald M. Payne, (D-NJ) introduced a bill to provide federal incentives for the planning and implementation of expanded learning initiatives. In addition, with support from Reps. Payne, George Miller (D-CA), and Howard McKeon (R-CA), funding for expanded learning time has been included in the discussion draft of the House of Representatives "No Child Left Behind (NCLB)" reauthorization bill. The Senate is expected to take up NCLB in the coming months, and key Senate education leaders have expressed support for the demonstration and federal funding.

"Expanded learning time programs provide students and teachers with the extra time and opportunities they need for students to succeed both in and beyond the classroom," said Senator Edward M. Kennedy, (D-MA), Chair of the Senate Committee on Health Education Labor and Pensions, who attended the evening reception. "We've seen it work in Massachusetts, and I look forward to expanding this success nationwide."

Congressman George Miller (D-CA), chair of the House Committee on Education and Labor, has expressed



Paul Reville, Co-Chair of the National Center, discusses federal policy with Leigh Hopkins of Public/Private Ventures



Chris Gabrieli, Co-Chair of the National Center, discusses the expanded learning time demonstration with Congressman Payne of New Jersey, who introduced the Expanded Learning Time Demonstration Act on September 24, 2007



Jennifer Davis, President and CEO of the National Center, discusses state outreach with Courtney Philips of the Eli and Edythe Broad Education Foundation

his support for federal funding. "All children deserve a high quality education," said Miller. "Expanded learning time is an important strategy for improving academic achievement and closing the achievement gap for students in high poverty schools."

The launch of the National Center on Time & Learning brings together the work of a number of organizations that have been promoting expanded learning time for the last several years. The event was hosted by the Center for American Progress, an independent policy organization that has documented and promoted effective expanded learning time programs and their impact on student achievement.

"We have seen the success that expanded learning time can have on schools across the country," said John Podesta, CEO of the Center for American Progress. "We are proud to work with the Congress, with other policy organizations, and with the new National Center on Time & Learning to help promote expanded learning time at the national level."

The successful Massachusetts initiative has thus far helped 18 schools redesign and expand their school schedules, with each school adding a minimum of 25% more time. The program is supported in FY 2007 by Governor Deval Patrick and the legislature with a \$13 million appropriation and administered by the Massachusetts Department of Education.

The National Center on Time & Learning is dedicated to expanding learning time to improve student achievement and enable a well-rounded education for all children. Through research, public policy, and technical assistance, we support national, state, and local initiatives that add significantly more school time for academic and enrichment opportunities to help all children meet the demands of the 21st century.

The National Center on Time & Learning is generously supported by a growing network of funders including The Eli and Edythe Broad Education Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and The Nellie Mae Education Foundation. We thank them for their partnership.

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